

April 27, 2016

The Honorable Joel Johnson
S-1286 House Office Building; P.O. Box 30014
Lansing, MI 48909

Dear Representative Johnson:

On behalf of the 800 members of the Michigan World Language Association and the 10,000 members of the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese, I am writing to oppose an amendment to HB 5463 that would allow students to fulfill the existing Michigan world language requirement with computer coding courses.

While learning a computer language strengthens math and science concepts, world language education focuses on different learning goals. The learning of a world language strengthens communication skills and introduces different cultures and perspectives. Students who study a world language also develop critical skills such as adaptability, empathy, and relationship building--skills that can be applied to many other fields that a student might choose to pursue. Thus, world language and computer coding should complement each other, not compete for attention.

Code.org is a non-profit organization dedicated to expanding computer science education by making it available in more schools and to more students. According to Amy Hirota, state policy and advocacy manager, "Although we use the term 'programming language' to refer to C++, Java, Python and so on, these aren't natural languages. Spanish has a vocabulary of 100,000 words, with a consistent grammatical and sentence structure. In contrast, a typical computing language has a vocabulary of about 100 words, and the real work is learning how to put these words together to build a complex program."

Recent surveys by the Michigan State University Collegiate Employment Research Institute indicate that American companies want global competence--language and cultural skills-- alongside STEM and business skills. A McKinsey Global Institute Report, "The World at Work: Jobs, Pay and Skills for 3.5 Billion People," found that worldwide, 40 percent of job growth in advanced markets like the US is going to foreign nationals because of language skills and cross-cultural competency.

Both computer coding skills and world language proficiency are highly valuable, but neither should take the place of the other. We implore Michigan legislators to vote "no" on any legislation, now or in the future, that equates or seeks to equate learning computer code to learning to a world language.

Sincerely,



Dr. Emily Spinelli
Executive Director; American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese (AATSP)
Public Affairs Liaison; Michigan World Language Association (MIWLA)